

Seminar Report

“Economic Impact of E-Commerce Strategies for Marketing Small And Micro Tourism Enterprises”

Period: 1st - 27th February 2004

Overall progress: All activities were completed as planned.

Planned activities: Planning and logistics of four consecutive seminar/trainings in Suva, West, Apia, Nuku'alofa and Vavau.

Detail report on the seminar/training.

- Fiji Seminar & Technical training. A list of participants, program and evaluation will be attached with the report.
- Samoa Seminar & Technical training. A list of participants and program will be attached with this report. Unfortunately, the evaluation forms and the sheets with discussion group ideas were misplaced during the travel; therefore, a summary of these won't be attached with the report.
- Tonga Seminar & Technical training. A list of participants, program and evaluation will be attached with the report.

Fiji 9th - 13th February

Suva - 9th February - Tanoa Plaza (Seminar)

USP - 10th Feb - USP Library Conference Room and USP Communications Conference Room (Technical Trainings)

Participants voiced their concern that smaller operators were generally not aware of the conducting business online and the Fiji Visitors Bureau should create more awareness on this issue. The price of Internet charges was raised as an issue that should be addressed by the government.

For the technical trainings, participant were divided into two groups; Email session for people with little to no IT skills and Webpage maintenance session for those who had some knowledge of website. Most participants were very grateful for these sessions as it was free of costs and had on hands practical session. However, some participants suggested that this training should have been longer and should have also contained elements of webpage design as well. They particularly wanted to know about how to obtain a domain name, hosting and how to go about selecting these. The participants were generally pleased with the Webpage session trainer; however, at times they had some difficulty in understanding the more technical IT terms that were used. The provision of a manual was also appreciated.

Nadi - 12th - Tanoa International Hotel (Seminar)

USP - 13th - USP Centre - Lautoka, Computer Labs (Technical Trainings)

Participants in here felt very strongly that the Fiji Visitors Bureau was not doing enough for the small operators and they want this to be changed. They wanted a team with the Bureau to be set up for these small operators, who would provide trainings in vernacular languages, provide continuous support and monitoring of these small businesses. It was also suggested that a common IT centre should be opened that works on behalf of the smaller operators to host and maintain their websites and to take email bookings on behalf of these operators for a small fee.

As in the Suva session for the technical session, participants were divided into two groups and were appreciative of the whole sessions as many of them had learnt a new skill. However, many

participants and the trainers for both sessions were very frustrated with the slow speed of internet in the West Centre. At times this made it difficult for the training to be productive. Therefore, the trainers decided to use only a few computers instead of one PC per person for the practices. This improved the situation and allowed participants to achieve the task that was allocated for the day.



Participants during a group discussion (Suva)



Participants planning their presentation strategy (Suva)



A group presentation (Suva)



Presentation by James McMaster (Principal Researchers)



Webpage maintenance session participants (Suva)



Email session participants (Suva)

Samoa - 16th - 17th Feb.

Apia - 16th - Aggie Greys Hotel, and 17th at USP Centre - Apia, Samoa (technical)

During discussions, participants raised concerns about the slow internet connection, disconnections, not enough training and knowledge of online bookings amongst the smaller operators, lack of networking amongst the smaller operators and less of representation of the smaller operators to the Tourism Bureau. It was recommended that the government should create a guideline and an action plan to monitor the development of the small operations in tourism industry. It was suggested that stakeholders should implement some way of online payment to assure confirmed bookings for small operators. The participants acknowledged that the Visitors Bureau was placing them online for free.

During the technical trainings, the participants emphasized that more of such trainings should be held. They wanted long term trainings, and possibly offered as evening courses as most of these operations were family run so do not have much time to spare. The participants stated that they learnt quite a lot from the technical sessions, particularly from the marketing aspects of the webpage session.



Participants with Chief Guests (Samoa)



Participants during a discussion (Samoa)



Webpage session group (Samoa)



Email session group (Samoa)

Tonga - 23rd - 26th Feb.

Nuku'alofa 23rd - 24th - USP Centre

Participants from outer islands stated that although they were interested in using Internet for business, they needed training to do so and Internet connection on the island as well. Many participants were also concerned that although the price of Internet was supposed to be cheap, due to high dial up cost, the total cost was usually very expensive. This was not very conducive for doing business online. A few participants felt that as they were older it was difficult for them to grasp the new methods of business using IT, it was suggested that more awareness and training could reduce the generation gap on this. Tonga Visitors Bureau had during the past year revamped its website with the assistance of AUSAID, however, many participants stated that they were not aware of this and would like to have more input and knowledge of this change. Participants did encouraged by the knowledge that the Visitors Bureau placed all operators for free on their website and updates could be done as per request.

Regarding the technical training, participants were encouraged to have such sessions but due to the very slow speed of internet connection at the USP Centre the participants were not able to completely update the webpage as identified in the program. It was suggested that in future a commercial Internet Café should be used for such trainings.

26th Feb. - Faineha High School - Vavau

Participants were appreciative of this opportunity to learn a new skill. One participant had traveled from another island and was overwhelmed when at the end of the day the trainer with his cooperation created a new webpage for his business. The participants were enthusiastic and wanted follow up trainings on this; however, many were interested in learning how to create a webpage from the start.



Chief Guest in Nuku'alofa seminar (Tonga)



The JICA Resident Representative (Tonga)

Dates and Venues

Suva - 9th – 10th Feb.

9th – Tanoa Plaza

10th – USP – Laucala Campus

Lautoka – 12th – 13th Feb.

12th - Tanoa International Hotel

13th - USP Centre – Lautoka, Computer Labs

Samoa - 16th – 17th Feb.

16th - Aggie Greys Hotel

17th - USP Centre – Apia, Samoa

Nuku'alofa - 23rd – 24th Feb.

23rd – 24th - USP Centre – Nuku'alofa, Tonga

26th Feb. – Faineha High School - Vavau

Seminar on ‘Economic Impact of E-Commerce strategies for Marketing Small and Micro Tourism Enterprises’

Date: 9th – 10th Feb.
Area: Suva
Venues: 9th - Tanoa Plaza – Suva
10th - USP Communications Room Conference Room for Web page session
- USP Library Conference Room for Email session

Objective:

General:

- Share the results of the research titled “*Economic Impact of E-commerce strategies for the marketing small and micro tourism businesses*”;
- Collect qualitative data from participants’ arising from their reflections, group brainstorming, and many discussions;
- Raise awareness of the tourism sectors stakeholders the usage of ICT as a marketing;

Technical:

- Provide basic trainings on how to use ICT for marketing by SMEs:
 - Email
 - Web page maintenance
 - Use of search engines.

Expected Outcomes:

- Incorporation of the qualitative data into the Final report;
- Contribute to the capacity building of tourism operator’s skills in order to improve the quality and standard on conducting business using the email, internet and web pages;
- Raise the profile of ICT usage in businesses, particularly amongst the small and medium sized enterprises;
- Raise the profile of the ICT Research component specifically and ICT Capacity Building @ USP Project generally.

Venue: USP Centre in each area

Participants

For the technical training on day two, participants will be divided into two groups:

- Beginners- who have very little knowledge on how to use email and/or internet and;
- Intermediate- for those who have good understanding of internet and are interested to learn web page maintenance.

Day One:

- Visitors Bureau
- Ministry of Tourism
- Academics
- Policy makers from other government departments
- Tourism and backpacking associations and/or networks in the area
- Backpacking operators, particularly those that participated in the research

Day Two:

- Tourism and backpacking associations and/or networks in the area
- Backpacking operators and/or staff, particularly those that participated in the research.

PROGRAMME

Day One

8.30-8.35	Welcome and Introduction Prof. James McMaster- Director – Pacific Institute of Management (USP) & Primary Researcher
8.35-8.50am	JICA Resident Representative – FIJI/SAMOA/TONGA
8.50-9.30am	Opening Speech Fiji Visitors Bureau/ Samoa Tourism Authority/ Tonga Visitors Bureau
9.30-10am	Participant Introduction
10-10.30am	Refreshments
10.30-11am	Overview of the ICT Capacity Building @ USP Project Ms. Maki Kato – Coordinator – ICT Capacity Building @ USP Project & Primary Researcher
11-11.30am	Introduction to the Research Concept Prof. James McMaster
11.30-1pm	Research results Prof. James McMaster, Ms. Maki Kato, Mr. Taholo Kami, Ms. Natasha Malik
1-2pm	Break
2- 3.30pm	Discussion on the results
3.30-4.30pm	Recommendations by the Stakeholders

Day two

8.30- 10.30am	Overview and Basics of Using Emails	} Workshop for With basic ICT Knowledge
10.30-11am persons	Practical Use of Emails	
11-1pm	Overview of Searching for Information on the Web Workshop for Beginners	
1-2pm	Break	
2-4pm	Overview of Web page Design	} Workshop for persons with some knowledge on Internet use
8.30-10.30am	Basics of Web page maintenance	
10.30am-1pm	How to perform basic maintenance of a web page	
1-2pm	Break	
2-4pm	Maintenance of a webpage by the participants (hands on practical)	
4-4.30pm	Evaluation of this training	
4.30pm	Closing Speech – Professor Fuji Takahashi/ Prof. James McMaster in Nadi/Apia/Nuku’alofa	

Evaluation of Suva E-commerce seminar – 9th Feb. 2004

This is a summary of the presentations made by Suva participants, feedback on how the two day seminar was delivered and recommendations for future seminars/workshops. Common issues amongst participants were identified and brief explanations on these issues are also highlighted below.

Issues

- Improve infrastructure
- Develop personnel through training by TPAF, or extended training programs by JICA.
- Create awareness for ecommerce through education at an early stage. This will help dispense the “traditional mind set” or fear of progress especially in terms of computers, IT or anything new in general.
- Assistance from Government and Policy-makers to help propel stakeholders starting out in ecommerce

Constraints

- Financial – a very common setback here in the Pacific; always seeking overseas aid
- Lack of technical/human expertise, resources etc in the field of IT/
- Lack of research in this field – proper research is needed in order to be abreast of international changes and movements to enhance knowledge
- Infrastructure – in terms of improving IT technology, basic infrastructure to help the industry get started
- Cultural setback- “malua fever” in the Pacific, this attitude needs to be broken through, locals need to be more commercial-minded to compete internationally, get rid of the traditional fear of getting into something as new as IT/Internet
- Marketing skills – for stakeholders starting out in this area there needs to be some substantial marketing skills in order for the new business to move forward

Opportunities

- Networking – at the moment lacking in this field; backpackers getting together, forming special groups to assist each other in all areas of the business and also to help convince policy-makers
- Economic growth – healthy economy leads to more opportunities in this field
- Political climate – a favorable political climate will attract investors into the country; potential assistance will be readily available
- Physical policies by present government

The way forward – we need to adopt a positive attitude; aggressive awareness campaign for stakeholders showing the great advantages they can gain from using ecommerce; open up the market by removing the monopolistic stand by telecom

Recommendation

- Seek assistance from overseas agencies, e.g., JICA
- Introduce and incorporate ecommerce into school curriculum
- Provide training for all stakeholders, esp. for those with the least exposure to IT
- Get more internet service providers, decrease present charges

Nadi Seminar Presentation

Group 1: How to reduce costs of developing websites

- Use a standard format when creating website
- Employ one Web-Master
- Fiji Visitors Bureaus to setup one information database
- This project should be subsidized by Government, that is, cost-sharing of webpage for SME's

Problems:

- Very expensive to create a website (up to \$3000)
- Lack of information on how to create website
- Unavailability of computers and lack of basic IT skills
- Lack of follow-up and support by Government Agencies, for instance, FVB and similar agencies

Possible solutions

- Backpackers Association O.I.C of Maintenance to collect information/receive enquiries and to pass on to SME's concerned. This service could be charged a small fee/commission % for all business generated.

Group 2: How to strengthen the IT skills of the backpacker operators

Issues:

- Lack of IT skills of backpacker operators

Constraints:

- Geographical location
 - business operators in remote areas and small islands have little to no access to computers
- Lack of equipment
 - high cost of computers
 - lack of power supply and phone lines in these remote areas
 - lack of internet connection
 - slow to very bad internet connection

Recommendations:

- Government to provide subsidies to operators for equipment, training and website development
- Link up with Governments other policies
 - micro-enterprise development
 - poverty reduction
 - employment creation

- Create awareness on the importance of using IT in small businesses

Action:

- Backpacker Association to submit a proposal to Government to
 - remove duty taxes on IT equipment purchased by operators
 - TPAF, FIT, USP and other training institutions to provide training to SME operators in remote islands; another possibility is to go online for free
 - ISP, Connect, MOT to develop a one page website for each operator free of charge
- National Microfinance Unit to provide training in local language
- Backpacker Association to promote all backpacker operations in Fiji – members and non-members more aggressively
- Establish a Backpacker’s Information Centre to be manned by one person. This Centre is to provide training on relevant IT topics continuously throughout the year
- Motivate operators to use email and have websites to
 - promote success stories to encourage others
 - identify a prominent person and have the Backpacker Association to get him/her to promote ecommerce
 - use TV advertising to promote the benefits of IT amongst SME’s
 - Submit a proposal to Connect Fiji to provide members of Backpacker Association Internet usage free of charge for a grace period of 2 months or so.

Group 3: How to motivate operators to go online

Issues: what is the problem?

- Education
- Training
- Seminars/workshops
- Exposure

Constraints:

- lack of education
- Lack of training and knowledge on Internet, creating websites etc
- Lack of exposure to modern technology/outside world in general (remote islands/areas)
- Geographical location

Opportunities

- Provide more workshops and so forth for stakeholders to increase their awareness as well as knowledge on ecommerce. These regular workshops can act as follow-up programs for FVB
- FVB, concerned Government agencies should “take education” to them, especially operators in remote islands/areas.

- Operators could also seek advice from overseas/international guests regarding Ecommerce. Information gathered through the exchange of experiences/stories can be a great deal of help to operators who are interested in Ecommerce. Guests may also volunteer to help operator(s) create their own website.

Recommendations:

- Aggressive lobbying for organizations involved to provide discounts, special packages and fees to interested operators.
- Free of charge service or a less expensive service to help operators create their own websites.

Action:

- Regular meetings between stakeholders to launch all the above issues
- Setup a special committee/body to oversee SME's

Tonga Seminar Presentation: Summary

How to Reduce Costs of Developing a Website

- A matter of choice
 - Cheap
 - Expensive
- Link home page to National Website
- Seek funds, locally or overseas aid/sponsorship
- Seek assistance from family and relatives living overseas
- Advertise your website on other business's advertisements/space

How to Strengthen IT Skills of Backpackers/Budget Operators

- Request JICA/USP to create or develop a website similar to the one they created in Fiji
- Strengthen communication and sharing of technical knowledge; also work closely with IT officer of TVB
- Organize a training program by relevant Government departments or other Organizations

How to motivate Operators to go Online

- Show them that it is easy to:
 - create a webpage
 - not expensive
 - easy to maintain
- Show positive results from being online

How to Market Your Site Online

- By linking with the National Website and other national and international sites
- Advertise through word of mouth
- Have Website address on business card
- List your website address on popular search engines